

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-07

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 EA-06 EUR-08 ORM-01 DHA-02 NSC-05

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

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S E C R E T BANGKOK 24246

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SREF, BG, TH

SUBJECT: BANGLADESH REQUEST FOR POLITICAL ASYLUM

SUMMARY: EMBASSY OFFICER RECEIVED A PERSONAL LETTER FROM DR. VICTOR H. UMBRIGHT, DIRECTOR OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS, MEMBER OF THE MEKONG COMMITTEE, SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS, ETC., ON NOVEMBER 17. DR. UMBRIGHT STATES WHAT HE LEARNED DURING A TRIP TO BANGLADESH IN EARLY NOVEMBER AND STRONGLY URGES THE UNITED STATES NOT TO GRANT POLITICAL ASYLUM TO THE BANGLADESH REFUGEES NOW RESIDENT IN BANGKOK. KEY PARAGRAPHS FROM HIS LETTER ARE QUOTED BELOW. END SUMMARY.

1. "I RETURNED FROM BANGLADESH ON NOVEMBER 3RD, AFTER SOME RATHER HECTIC DAYS IN DACCA. IT WAS JUST THE PERIOD WHEN THE SECOND WAVE OF KILLINGS STARTED AND WHEN PRESIDENT KHANDAKAR MUSHTAQUE AHMED WAS FORCED TO RESIGN. I HAD LONG CONVERSATIONS WITH HIM AND WITH SOME OTHER MEMBERS OF HIS CABINET JUST BEFORE THE SECOND BLOOD BATH ON NOVEMBER 3RD. TRUE ENOUGH, ONE COULD SENSE A CERTAIN ELECTRICITY IN THE

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POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE AND THERE WAS CONSIDERABLE RUMBLING

AND GRUMBLING GOING ON AMONG SOME OF THE POLITICIANS AND OF THE HIGH-GRADE MILITARY PEOPLE, WHO WERE IN CLEAR DIS-AGREEMENT WITH THE CAPTAINS AND MAJORS WHO WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE KILLING OF THE SHEIK AND HIS FAMILY AND SUBSEQUENTLY OF HIS MINISTERS. THEY WERE PUSHING FOR BRINGING THEM TO TRIAL AS CRIMINALS - AND IT WAS NOT DIFFICULT TO PERCEIVE A TREND TOWARDS A NEW SHOW-DOWN BETWEEN THE VARIOUS FACTIONS. HOWEVER, NOBODY EXPECTED IT TO COME IN SUCH A WAVE OF EXTREME BRUTALITY WHEN IN ADDITION TO THE FOUR IMPRISONED MINISTERS (MANSUR ALI, NAZRUL ISLAM, KAMARUZZAMAN AND TAJUDDIN AHMED) THREE MORE MINISTERS WERE KILLED AND 19 OTHER FORMER SYMPATHIZERS OF THE SHEIK (MOSTLY AWAMI-LIGUE MEMBERS). I MANAGED TO GET OUT OF THE COUNTRY BY A HELICOPTER DOWN TO CALCUTTA AND THEN TO EUROPE.

2. "SURPRISINGLY, THE ECONOMIC SITUATION OF THE COUNTRY HAS SHOWN A REMARKABLE IMPROVEMENT OVER THE LAST 12 MONTHS: BETTER FOOD SITUATION, GREATER FOOD STOCKS, GREATER EXPORTS, NO BUDGETARY DEFICIT, NO STRIKES, BETTER PUBLIC WORKS PROGRAMME, BETTER "FOOD FOR WORK" PROJECTS, LESS UNEMPLOYMENT, MORE EFFICIENT ADMINISTRATION (ALTHOUGH STILL AT A DEPLORABLE LEVEL), ETC. BUT WHAT THE ELIMINATION OF THE BETTER PART OF THE POLITICAL LEADERSHIP WILL ENTAIL, IS DIFFICULT TO JUDGE. WE HAVE TO WAIT AND SEE.

3. "THERE IS ONE GREAT WORRY WHICH I HAVE AND WHICH I HASTEN TO CONVEY TO YOU, AND HOPEFULLY THROUGH YOU TO OTHER AMERICAN AUTHORITIES. IT CONCERNS THE DEMAND FOR POLITICAL ASYLUM WHICH THE MURDERERS OF THE SHEIK AND OF HIS SYMPATHIZERS APPEAR TO HAVE LAUNCHED WITH YOUR EMBASSY AFTER THEY ACCEDED TO BANGKOK. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS HERE IN EUROPE, THESE JUNIOR MILITARY PEOPLE, TOGETHER WITH THEIR FAMILIES NUMBERING BETWEEN 25 AND 30, ARE NOW CLAMOURING FOR A SAFE HEAVEN IN AMERICA.

4. "I PRAY THAT THE AMERICAN AUTHORITIES REJECT THIS DEMAND RIGHT AWAY. ACCORDING TO MY INFORMATION WHICH I RECEIVED FROM MEMBERS OF THE CABINET, THESE MILITARY PEOPLE ARE OUTRIGHT CRIMINALS, THEY NOT ONLY MURDERED THE SHEIK, BUT THEY ALSO KILLED HIS WIFE WITH A KNIFE; THEY

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KILLED THE TWO MARRIED SONS OF THE SHEIK, TOGETHER WITH THEIR YOUNG WIVES (ONE WAS MARRIED FOR 15 MONTHS, THE OTHER FOR THREE WEEKS); THEY ALSO KILLED THE BABY OF THE OLDER SON AND THEY CHASED THE YOUNGEST BOY OF THE SHEIK, 11 YEARS ONLY, IN THE GARDEN AND SHOT HIM THERE. THE PARENTS-IN-LAW OF THE YOUNGER SON, WHO HAPPENED TO BE IN THE SHEIK'S HOUSE ON THAT FATEFUL DAY, WERE ALSO KILLED.

5. "THERE ARE NO WORDS FOR SUCH EXTREME BRUTALITY AND CRUELTY. THESE CRIMINALS SHOULD BE SENT BACK TO BANGLADESH AND TRIED BY A MILITARY COURT, BUT AMERICA DESPITE ITS TRADITION OF GENEROUSITY AND MAGNANIMITY, CAN NOT OPEN ITS DOORS FOR THESE BANDITS.

6. "PLEASE EXCUSE MY EXPRESSING AN OPINION ON THIS SAD AND TRAGIC STORY. BUT KNOWING THE HAPPENINGS IN BANGLADESH PROBABLY BETTER THAN MOST PEOPLE, I CONSIDER IT MY DUTY TO DRAW THE ATTENTION OF THE AMERICAN AUTHORITIES TO THE TRUTH. I THOUGHT AT FIRST OF ADDRESSING A LETTER TO ONE OF MY FRIENDS IN THE STATE DEPARTMENT IN WASHINGTON, BUT I AM NOT QUITE CERTAIN OF THEIR ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES AND WHETHER IT IS ANOTHER DEPARTMENT, PERHAPS JUSTICE OR SO, THAT HANDLES SUCH CASES. THEREFORE MY LETTER GOES TO YOU."

7. THE EMBASSY OFFICER IS RESPONDING TO DR. UMBRIGHT'S LETTER INDICATING THE DEPARTMENT'S SPOKESMAN HAS SAID NO DECISION HAS BEEN MADE, THAT THE REFUGEES IN BANGKOK ARE NOT PUSHING THE EMBASSY FOR ACTION ON THEIR REQUEST, AND INDEED THEY APPEAR TO BE READYING THEIR RETURN TO BANGLADESH, THANKING HIM FOR HIS CONCERN AND TELLING DR. UMBRIGHT THAT HIS LETTER HAS BEEN FORWARDED TO THE PROPER DEPARTMENT AUTHORITIES.
WHITEHOUSE

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